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Lyman rebounded. 221st day of the war

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In the last days of September, Ukrainian forces outflanked Russian positions in the northeastern region of Donetsk Oblast, leading to the hasty withdrawal of enemy units from the surrounding villages and Lyman (1 October). In the final period of fighting, this pre-war town of 20,000 was to be defended by up to 5,500 soldiers from the 2nd Army Corps (the so-called Luhansk People's Militia) and volunteer battalions of the Russian Army Reserve – BARS – along with residual subunits from units of the Western and Central Military Districts. Ukrainian forces are continuing eastwards – towards Kreminna in Luhansk Oblast. According to still unconfirmed information, they were to approach the town from the south and seize the local road junction and the crossing of the Zherebets river (towns of Torske and Zarichne). In the rest of the Donbas, the situation did not change significantly – Russian forces made repeated attempts to advance on Bakhmut. They attacked unsuccessfully south of Siversk, north-west of Horlivka and north and south-west of Donetsk.

On 1 October, Ukrainian units resumed offensive operations in Kherson Oblast and were successful in its part bordering Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. They captured two villages (Arkhanhelske and Myroliubivka). Fighting continues on the existing line of contact, but Russian troops are to withdraw and form a new line of defence several kilometres south along the western bank of the Dnieper. Ukrainian forces were also to attack the border of the Mykolaiv and Kherson oblasts, including in the direction of Kherson. Particularly fierce fighting occurred in the junction village of Davydiv Brid, where the Ukrainian attack and subsequent Russian attempts to eliminate the defenders' positions east of the Inhulets river in late September failed.

Russian artillery and aviation continuously attacked Ukrainian army positions and facilities along the line of contact and in the border areas of Chernihiv and Sumy oblasts and, more recently, Kharkiv. However, the centre of gravity of the strikes against the deep Ukrainian hinterland has shifted southwards, where the intensity of attacks on Zaporizhzhia, Kryvyi Rih, Mykolaiv and Odesa has increased. These cities – as well as Dnipro – were, moreover, targets of rocket attacks. A relative calm occurred in Kharkiv (towns on its outskirts were attacked). Nor did the Russians stop their attacks on Nikopol, Ochakiv, Kramatorsk and Sloviansk. Ukrainian forces shelled and bombarded the aggressor in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts and Donbas. Kherson and Nova Kakhovka (including the Nova Kakhovka bridge area) and the Russian hinterland in Luhansk Oblast remain their primary targets.

The Ukrainian General Staff reports on the ongoing reinforcement of Russian forces in the south. Additional Rosgvardiya subdivisions were due to arrive in Berdiansk and Melitopol. In

the area of the latter city, the first soldiers from the new enlistment were also to appear as part of the so-called partial mobilisation. In addition, the Russians were to bring in further sub-units with S-300 systems, used – contrary to their original purpose – mainly to fire at ground targets. On 30 September, military units in Crimea were to be placed on full alert.

The withdrawal of Russian troops from Izyum has been the subject of open criticism by, among others, Ramzan Kadyrov (a large proportion of the volunteers taking part in the fighting came from Chechnya) and former commander of the 58th All-Military Army, now a Duma deputy, Major General Andrey Gurulyov. The commander of the Central Military District, General Aleksandr Lapin, who was in charge of the operation in the north-eastern part of the Donetsk Oblast, was found guilty of the defeat in the area. At the same time, the Chief of General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, was held responsible for the failure of the entire operation.

As part of another $1.1bn package of US military support, Ukraine will receive 18 HIMARS launchers, 12 Titan drone countermeasure systems, 300 vehicles, dozens of trucks with trailers, radar, communications, reconnaissance and explosive detection assets and spare parts. Unlike previous packages, the pledged armaments and military equipment are mostly not from the US army's stockpile and will only be produced. The Ukrainian state will receive them no sooner than one to two years. Denmark, Norway and Germany have signed a contract worth €92 million (some sources say €93 million), under which Slovakia will produce 16 Zuzana 2 self-propelled cannon howitzers for Ukraine. According to French media, the Ukrainian army is also to receive between six and 12 CAESAR cannon howitzers previously ordered for the Danish army. In turn, the Lithuanian defence ministry has concluded a contract with Poland's WB Electronics to supply Ukraine with two sets of Warmate circulating munitions (a launcher and 37 so-called kamikaze drones in each). On 2 October, the corvette 'Hetman Ivan Mazepa' (Ada-class) – the first large ship not inherited from the Soviet Union for the Ukrainian Navy – was launched in Turkey.

According to the General Staff of Ukraine, intensive construction work is underway at the Belarusian airfield Luninets (Brest Oblast), located 50 km from the border. Barracks and ammunition depots are being repaired. Russian missile squadrons armed with S-400 systems and new radiolocation stations have been observed near the borderline. As a result of intelligence activities, it has been confirmed that the Belarusian army keeps up to seven battalion tactical groups (4,000–6,000 men in total) on standby near Ukrainian territory. For the past six months, systematic military exercises have been taking place in Belarus with the participation of representatives of the security ministries.

Following the announcement of annexation in the occupied Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts, forced mobilisation into the Russian army began. Men are detained in the streets and sent to military commissions. The lack of a Russian passport does not exempt them from conscription, and the occupation authorities recognise all those living in the annexed territories as citizens of the Russian Federation. The occupants have blocked all exit roads to prevent attempts to escape to the territories controlled by Ukrainian troops.

Commentary

- The seizure of Lyman, the last significant point of Russian defence in the northeastern part of the Donetsk Oblast, represents an undoubted Ukrainian tactical success and plays

a considerable role politically. Lyman is a local transport hub, and its capture secures the Ukrainian side's main crossing of the Donets in this area towards Sloviansk, as well as unblocking the link to Siversk from the Kharkiv Oblast, but it has no major operational significance. The seizure of the city and the crossing of the Luhansk Oblast by Ukrainian troops confirm that the Ukrainians keep the initiative on the front regained at the beginning of September. The resumption of offensive operations in the Kherson Oblast should also be seen in this context. The Ukrainian army has been consistently pushing hostile units out of the areas that the Kremlin believes are now supposed to be part of Russia. One should assume that Kyiv will consistently seek to regain as much territory as possible, primarily in Luhansk Oblast. At the same time, actions in other directions should now be seen more as aimed at tying down Russian forces and capitalising on the euphoria on the front of successes.

- By surrendering Lyman, the Russian army has demonstrated for the third time since 24 February that, unlike Soviet-era practice, it can decide to withdraw to minimise casualties. However, the last weeks of the city's defence indicate that, apart from this, its modus operandi is entirely in the Soviet tradition, i.e. attachment to an assumed scheme of operations, deception about the situation on the front and lack of flexibility. The main argument in favour of the latter is the situation in the rest of the Donbas, where the Russians are continuously undertaking offensive operations. It remains an open question why they have not decided to halt them, go on the defensive and redeploy some of their forces to reinforce the Lyman defence. In doing so, it must be assumed that the local aggressor grouping still does not have adequate reserves that could be committed to the fighting without depleting other sections. Information from the region suggests that new reinforcements are consistently directed southwards – to the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts. While the loss of Lyman does not significantly change the military situation, it poses a significant problem for the invaders in other dimensions. This is because they have been allowed to cede territory that, in Russia's optics, is part of its territory. The open criticism of the actions not only of the local but also of the supreme command of the Russian Armed Forces should be seen in this context. This situation is another factor negatively affecting the motivation of Russian soldiers, especially as a successively more significant proportion of them will be newly mobilised.
- The decision to carry out forced mobilisation in the 'annexed' territories has a repressive character. Men who are conscripted have no motivation to fight, and their military skills are low. This means that even the execution of mobilisation plans will not guarantee to strengthen the combat potential of the units being formed or replenished. On the other hand, ongoing mobilisation in Russia continues to face organisational obstacles. The chaotic conscription, which has the character of a 'brigade', sometimes includes people who are unfit for military service or do not have the necessary qualifications. The rise in anti-mobilisation sentiment has prompted a reaction from local administrations, forcing the military authorities to verify the legitimacy of conscription, resulting in the dismissal of some of those already conscripted. However, this has not improved the mobilisation process – the military commissions continue to operate under pressure to implement the plan and do not give up handing out summonses in the streets or at the exit of villages.